

Edge City



2002

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An Unedited Letter from the Editors:

Well, here it is: the long awaited 2002 Edition of *Edge City*. I think it's safe to say we've made the best of a tumultuous year—first with the chaotic reincarnation of Mu Xi, then with everything from fundraising efforts to an overwhelming response of over ninety submissions from around campus.

It's a bit hard to say anything original about our work this year since our sentiments are practically identical to those expressed by Clint Shulenski in his forward to *Edge City* in 1994. This edition actually became our model for 2002, and the similarities between the two years are amazing: the dream of bringing back *Edge City* after a few years out of publication, open mics and meetings to promote membership and submissions, a low estimate on the amount of work involved in producing a magazine, and yeah, the rest of the same damn comments. Hopefully the work within is more original than this preface.

But while I'm on a roll, let's continue the drivél. First, this magazine will continue. Several Mu Xi members, myself included, have sold their souls to have *Edge City* exist long after we leave Mansfield, and it better be worth it. Once I sold a plastic fork for fifty bucks, but it turned out to be a bad deal when I was stuck on I-80 for three hours with a blown head-gasket and a bowl of spaghetti. Well, the fifty bucks served as a down payment for a tow, but that didn't stop me from being hungry—I mean, have you ever tried to eat spaghetti with your hands? If you get the point of equating my soul with a plastic fork, let me know; otherwise, I'll be content to say that there is no point except that I'm in the mood for Italian.

Second, our thanks go out to all submitters to the magazine. We unfortunately could not accept all work, but what's here we hope will be regarded as a selection of quality creative endeavors from the students of Mansfield University. SHAMELESS PLUG: We encourage submissions from everyone, so please consider submitting starting in Fall of next year. True, *Edge City* is heavy with English majors, but that's because we're sad people who live in closets reading Wordsworth with a flashlight. We really have nothing better to do, so it'd be great if you could make us feel important by submitting. Thanks.

Lastly, we owe special thanks to everyone who as made *Edge City* possible this year. I've been watching video recordings of past Grammy winners, so here goes: I'd like to thank the English Department faculty for their continued support and encouragement to the organization, especially Dr. John Ulrich and Mr. Tom Caulfield for advising us, Anthony Folcarelli for providing a venue for our publication party, the Committee on Finance and Student Government for their financial support, Pepsi, Miramax Films, my family—momma, I love you—Cheech and Chong, the San Diego Zoo, the living embodiment of slack, Dharma, Greg, Barney Gumble, and the cast of *Beowulf* starring none other than the highlander himself, Christopher Lambert. We love you all.

Thank you, and GOOD NIGHT!

❖ Scott Gibson, on behalf of the edditors

Mu Xi Literary Society Members, 2001-2002

Chris Kubrick

Carmen Chase

Kristi Eben

Joseph King

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Gretchen Biscardi

Beth Dietz

Bobbi Button

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Jessica Beard

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Morgan Hugo

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Faculty Advisors:

John Ulrich

&

Thomas Caulfield

The Eviction of an Angel

"Get it out of me!" Wow, I must have been a pain in the placenta to give birth to. From what I understand I was really fighting to stay in my nice cozy home that I had lived in since conception. I fought for seventeen hours until I decided that my mom went through enough pain and that she finally deserved to cherish her little angel. I was born Patricia Veronica Ames on August 3, 1980, and I was the adorable daughter of Tracy and Marie Ames.

It was quite a surprise when my parents found out they were expecting. No one really planned on me coming into the world quite so soon. My mother was 20 and my dad was 18 when I was conceived. It was the end of the 70s when my father's sperm met my mother's egg. My parents were the perfect hippie couple. Smoking weed and drinking beer consisted of their daily rituals. Once my mother was informed of her nine-month medical condition she cleaned up and stopped all her bad habits. I was very grateful for her decision. However, this didn't affect my dad in the least. His bad habits would have a major affect of my mom's pregnancy.

Seven months into the pregnancy my mother and father were driving home from a friends. Dad had been drinking like usual, and because I was growing so rapidly my mother couldn't drive. It was raining out and dad hadn't consumed any more liquor than normal, however it was still too much. The rain began to fall more rapidly and dad took a turn a little to hard. We hydroplaned and all I remember was doing summersaults in my warm waterbed. It was so much fun for me, but for my mom it was rather horrific. The doctor told us that I should be fine and that I would suffer no damage from my dad's alcoholic mistake. Whoa, what a relief! I am so glad my mom is so protective of me.

Two months later, August 2nd, my parents went to Das Awuckles Fest. Das Awucks Fest was a car show held in the town next to ours. Mom and dad went with two of their friends, and the only reason they agreed to go was if my mom promised that she would not go into labor. She swore that there was no way I was coming out, and she was right. I loved being in her belly. She fed me so well, she rubbed my body, and she always talked to me. Unfortunately, mom and I were wrong. I moved in an awkward way and all of a sudden my waterbed went flat. Boy, was I mad. How could mom take me to a loud car show, and then take away my waterbed. Ooooh, she was going to pay for it.

I don't remember how we got to the hospital. When we got there people began pushing on me, and poking me with weird objects. This was not pleasing to my already bad mood. Next thing you know my mom gets all tense and I am being evicted from my home. I wasn't moving out that easily. Mom and I fought back and forth. She would try to push me out and I would squirm my way back up there. This went on for what felt like forever. Finally my head go stuck in the exit door. I didn't like what I saw. It was so bright and cold. I tried to go back home, but the doctor grabbed a hold of my brain. "Ahhhhhhh." I screamed. Some stranger was kidnapping me. Finally I realized how much I wanted to see my mommy. I gave up and mom won. My eviction was well worth it. Mommy was so nice and pretty. I was so smelly, slimy, and tired.

I immediately fell asleep in my mom's arms. My new home was wonderful. I was an angel in disguised. After my nice nap with mom, these nasty doctors took me away again. Not happy! I screamed until mom came in to talk to me. All was well from here on in. It would be mom and I for a very long time. Twenty-one years later, mom and I are still extremely close.

The Thing

(a found poem)

Archetype, the first or original thing.
Two paired Things are a couplet.
Let them run together for enjambment.

The epic is a long Thing;
Its form is length.
Haiku is a short thing,
Nature that surrounds you—I think.

Irregular Things, lyric Things,
Open lines—
Take any Thing—make it
A motif, give it some meter,
It will sing.

Onomatopoeic Thing
Clenched by rhyme or repented,
Gives a new persona—
Each and every time.

A riddle, sestina, or sonnet
Require sound, structure and
Soul.
This is the Thing called
Poetry.

❖ Bobbi Button

Winter

In a time when silence reigns—
in a time when none of my good deeds
fall fulfilled—
in a time when birth lies dormant
I see the gray whites, the gray blacks,
and the blue nights.
I see the rose, but it is only thorn.
I touch it swift, leave a mark
and then the grays are red.
and then my skin is red.
and my hand falls back
chastised by the world.

❖ Andrew Glover

Ory Hodis, Morgan Miller, and Me (Running to Portland) —a song

Where have you gone?
Haven't seen you for a while.
Senseless,
Restless,
Reckless,
But tonight, I'm missing your bright smile.

Chasing the sun,
Which casts no shadow this time of year.
Jaded,
Faded,
Traded,
Ory Hodis—fear binds you to her.

Chorus:
Cosmic dilemma
Brownsville junction
Morgan Miller and me
Looking across the nation
Trading photographs for memories.

Why did you run?
Just to return again to that life?
Dreaming,
Weeping,
Scheming,
Hopeful someday wrongs will become rights.

Hiding,
Lying,
Sighing,

Chorus:
Cosmic dilemma
Brownsville junction
Morgan Miller and me
Looking across the nation
Trading photographs for memories.

Hopeful someday wrongs will become rights.

❖ Erin Delaney

from lucifer

dancing with a suicidal jesus,
laughter a present
wrapped in a scruffy, itchy, dirty, beard.
"it's time to give in," he says. "why?"
i think i asked that...maybe
he did.

dust or sun or crowns of thorns, we gasp
at it all. miracles of everyday
things, the ability to walk into clichéd sunsets,
we're all still
pampered children begging
for another piece of bread
with no crust.
sandals and dried out shins,
torn, dirty, weather-beaten robes,
how lovely.

a waltz with Suicidal Jesus,
we leap through the fantastical,
water or wine,
we're still drunk.
inhale crops of crap and anger and resentment
and joy and black plague and witnesses
to chariot crashes.
there's a party, but
jesus is too busy masturbating
with his depression.
"he's coming, he's coming" everyone yells.
the disciples languish
in rooms robed with cracked pots of water.
we all wait.
we're all followers
of disasters. it's a conquest of hate.
martyrs are now married. we're all looking
to be buried.

boogie down with Suicidal Jesus,
he complains a lot. "it's hard to walk
with broken legs." "i'll never be
true history." he says
he has no favorite
song, but he's partial to the stones'
sympathy for the devil.
he heals everyone
but himself and i get to watch
him stumble as he mumbles
his daily prayers.
circles in the dust and we all belch
out dry heaves. disciples of a broken man
with cracked lips, red sleepless eyes, a nasty
beard, and wine-stained, fish-stenched, dirt
crusted robe.

a last gasp with Suicidal Jesus,
he's finally accepted
my plan. we'll all dance
as he carries the burden
of every fucking martyr,
a crucified, suicidal, broken man.

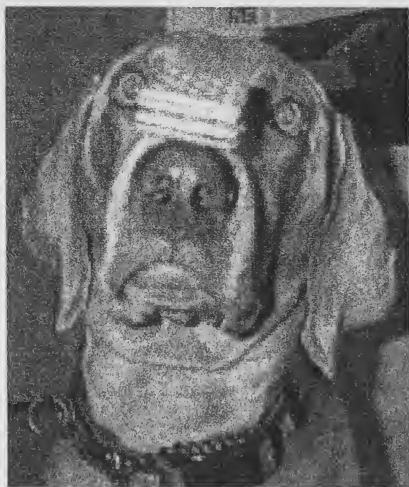
a resurrection dance with a saved jesus,
his martyrdom now complete.
people bask
in the holes in his wrists,
attempt to seed
the holes in his feet,
and we slurp
from the wound on his side.
drunken cheer
that leads to the inquisitions and bombed clinics
now i'm forced to dance alone.

is it wrong to say i love him?

❖ Joel Lee



Box of Crackers



"I'm hungry."
"Eat these."
"How old are they?"
"You want em', or not?"
"Fine."

The box pops open and the plastic bag inside has been left gaping. Five of the orange crackers are lifted out of the bag, three and a half make it to inside his mouth.

"They taste like crap."
"What do you want?"
"Some damn food."
"Well, don't look at me."

The man with nothing to offer his friend, curls into a ball on his favorite, and only, chair. He nurses his big gulp while his sunken eyes watch his friend. His friend stretches out on the ugly oval rug laid out in front of the chair.

"Do you remember high school?" the floor dweller asks.

"No, in two years I forgot a four year chunk of my life. You know - two steps forward, four steps back."

"That doesn't make sense."
"Yeah, I remember high school."
"You remember when we sang?"
"Sang? You mean mandatory chorus?"
"It was only mandatory for two years."
"Still mandatory."

Another cracker is crunched.

"Take you're damn crackers, taste like the rug."
"You tasted the rug?"
"Shut up."

The box is thrown into the chair ruler's sphere, which he is forced to open, to catch i

"Hey, you wanted 'em"
"So, you thought chorus was forced on us? You could of taken art."

"I can't draw. Anyway, all the girls had to show up for chorus. In art, they had separate periods. I would of had a smaller hunting ground."

"Yeah, yeah. You really didn't like it?"
"What's to like? Bunch a fags stuck in puberty, trying to crack through 'America the Beautiful.'"

"Alright, alright, but at least then we had some type of meaning outside that of necessity. Rehearsals after school, talking about concerts with other singers, they were something that gave us something more than bread and water.

Now that we're out, all we do is get up go to work, come home. And once we're home, all we do is stare at that damn ceiling fan with three blades spin around."

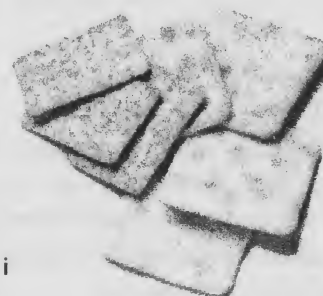
"Hey, you're the one that broke the fourth off."
"That's not the - What is the meaning of you life right now?"
"Mmmm...let's see, meaning..."
"C'mon, c'mon. First thing that pops in to your head."
"Alright, Contentment."
"Contentment?"
"Yeah, I like what I got. Even if you look at it like something you stepped in."
"But if we were doing something beyond necessity, don't you think -- "
"Gary?"
"Yeah?"
"Contentment."
"Contentment?"

The chair guru tosses the box of stale orange squares onto the carpet keeper's stomach. He sits up and holds the box with his left hand. He looks at a faded purple imprint on the top flap.

"It says that they shouldn't be eaten passed the date on -- "
"Gary."

The current resident of the rug looks up to the owner of the chair.

"Contentment."
"Contentment?"
"Eat the damn crackers."



Romance, Ribbons and Lilacs as Explained by Gram

My wide German nose sniffs the air
attracted to the scent of Lilacs.
My Irish grandmother wraps yellow
ribbons around my long auburn ponytails.
“They are the first to appear,” she explains
to Lilacs as I examine to tight curls
of her silver cap. Clustered as close
as a Monarch butterfly clinging to
the Lilac bush outside the window. This
room, decorated with romance and
filled with perfumed scents of Lilacs
is where Gram watered the roots of my unopened buds.

“When spring announces its arrival
through the Lilacs, you always run
to the silver tips of the bush—you have to
be the first to notice them.”

“Why do you like them, Gram?” Her large
breasts rise as the question fills her body.

“They remind me of romance,
and of sweethearts... they blanket the world with
a nice new scent. Lilacs remind me
of butterflies.”

My bright auburn has become burnt brown,
unable to hold a ribbon. Gram is gone, yet I
spot glimpses of her silver tips in
my own strands. Each June I watch the
Monarch cling to the Lilacs. Wanting to
notice them first, I run to the bush.
The wind is filled with
a scent I now call romance.

❖ Bobbi Button

Who am I?

I stare at the canvas
And I cannot answer.
This woman-child in front of me,
Is only a water colored shell,
Is only imagery.
What lies behind these eyes?
What lies in the soul?
I do not know.
Water colored paintings,
Pastel, pink lips,
But what lies behind that smile?
Colors on the canvas,
Eyes the color of the sky
What's hidden in their blue depths?
Give me the answers I need,

Show me who I am,
Let it be clear like myself on the canvas.
Clear like the blues,
Soft like the pink,
Show me the woman
Who lives behind the canvas.
Show me the child
Who's trapped in the mirror.
Let me understand.
Lead me to the path,
Let me find the way.

Will answers come from paintings?
Will it show me how?
In a sea of paint?
If I touch her will she flinch?
Will she move like I would?
Can a portrait convey her beauty,
The beauty she possesses inside?
Can a portrait tell me who I am,
Tell me what I've been trying to find?
Her smile brushes across my face.

❖ Hillary Grumbine

All In My Head: Ramblings From The Ultimate Wedding Planner

Questions that drive me crazy-"When are you going to settle down?" "Haven't you found a good man yet? What's your problem?" or my all time favorite-"You're how old and your not married yet?"

I planned my first wedding at age five. It was to be one hell of a wedding. My dog was to be the ring bearer, my best friend was to be my maid of honor and my newly appointed husband was going to be the cute little boy that sat in the back of the room. Too bad he decided he liked my best friend more than he liked me. Our children would have been so cute.

Since then, I have changed my ideal wedding a bit. I've dropped the dog being the ring bearer long ago. I thought about trying out my cat for the position but as wild as she is I'm sure she'd run off with the rings, never to be found again. As for my best friend being my maid of honor, well we'd have to change that a bit too. I don't think my best friend would enjoy the thoughts of wearing a pink taffeta, ballerina style dress in front of one hundred and fifty on lookers. Of course it would be completely hilarious and worth it to me but that's beside the point. I guess we'll have to stick with a tux, not to say that if he were a woman that I would be so cruel as to pick out such and outfit, I mean come on! I have better tastes than that!

As for finding a good man (and I know all you men are thinking something like-oh gees here we go...let the fun begin) well that's been quite the challenge. Whoever wrote those story lines for Disney films needs to be shot and killed. I've been dating quite a long time and my damn prince has yet to show up. Oh don't worry, I've been on dates and had my fair share of boyfriends. And believe me, I've even planned a wedding or two then, too.

My first "adult" wedding fantasy happened soon after I started college. It was kismet, or so I thought. We met through mutual friends one night at dinner in the fabulous Manser dining hall. We sat looking around the room as our mutual friends began a heated argument about...Well it doesn't really matter what it was about seeing how I don't recall. We began chatting over the yelling and discovered an immediate attraction to one another. For once I actually believed those wonderful Disney movies I grew up on were right! I actually heard music-or perhaps that was just the music coming from the video jukebox in South Side Court. We began our on and again off again relationship from that moment on.

Our relationship lasted almost six years. So therefore I had planned on average about 200,599,006 different weddings in my head. All right perhaps that figure should be more around six or seven different weddings. Either way, my mind was working overtime. I even went so far as to pick out wedding dresses, design a cake and figure out where the wedding was to take place. The only problem was I had no ring. Oh I had been asked on several occasions but never formally. Perhaps this was the reason the relationship crashed and burned.

My next dream union came about a year after that one. The only difference was I wasn't the one planning it. The guy I was dating at the time was planning it. Sound odd? We're only getting started. I should have seen the psycho warning signs the night he stayed over with me and never left. And I know what your thinking-he had to leave at some point, what about his job? When I said he never left, I meant he never left. He quit his job, called his grandparents with whom he was living with at the time to bring over his things and never left. Don't get me wrong; it was lovely for a time coming home from work and finding the apartment completely clean and dinner cooked. But, when your making \$6 an hour, have a car payment, rent, utilities, insurance and numerous other bills to pay a second mouth to feed that wasn't produced out of your own body is stretching it. Needless to say his dream of being married to a sugar mama died rather quickly.

Since this encounter, I have decided to just sit back and let things happen. Do I still continue to plan my wedding? You bet. Have I become one of those desperate women who would say yes at the drop of the hat when a man asks them to marry him? You bet. **JUST KIDDING!** Hello! I'm single, not desperate. And when someone in my family asks me, the last single, unattached female in the family when I'm going to get married do I let it bother me? Not at all. If it happens it happens. I'll just enjoy living with my crazy cat, meeting interesting new prospects and planning my dream wedding, even if it's just only in my head.

Trees

A week ago I saw a tree.
I see a lot of trees, though.
I didn't stop to think about it.
I was in a hurry.
I glanced at it as I passed by.

Yesterday, I saw another tree.
It wasn't very different.
Not tall or short.
Not bare or full.
Not different at all.
I'm not sure how
It caught my eye.
But it made me think.

I've been looking at them now
More than ever.
I thought people
Might have thought me strange.
Watching trees.
But they hardly seemed to
notice.

Today somebody look at me
The way I used to look at trees.
Just in passing.
Simple scenery.
I wonder if the tree was hurt.

❖ *Minelle Sallade*



Autumn Tanka

Golden hands sensuate me.
Others mount above,
Blanketing the believer,
Blessing and saving
My spirit for nature's frost.

❖ *Bobbi Button*

Trophy

There are four of them
Among the rouged black mass.
Heads swinging and eyes glazed,
Their white chests are puffed like snowdrifts.

Matted fur and blackened hoof
Stands eye-to-eye with autumn turf.
With high crown donned,
He rises tall among them.

His crown stands tall and strong as he,
But no more it remains.
I crouch as orange in the brown,
With the somber shine lying in my shoulder.

His crown lay in five pieces,
And his followers lay in none.
I stand with "x" still hanging.
He remains with me, until my "x" gives way.

The eyes are no longer glazed
And only one remains in his place.
The dethroned king stands failing his tufted robe,
Wishing I had struck six inches lower.

❖ *Kory Sponaugle*

Hand

The light falls, etching shadows on your hand.
Skin-smooth and taunt across muscle and bone—
Strength displayed in subtle movements—
Stretching, grasping, with slow undulation—
Still now, the shadowed veins providing the map,
The way to ecstasy, the promises held there.

Joseph King

Los Matices de la Vida
(translation)

Quien diría que en el prado
Había tanta compañía
Los matices de la vida
Son momentos de utopía

Que los muertos vivirían
Que los vivos matarían
Que los ojos mentirían
Sí la vida, que ironía

Mas los pasos cada día
Contenían vida mía
Las más bellas cualidades
Y confusas estadias

Por momentos de locura
Por momentos de amargura
Esta vida, corta vida
Los matices de la vida

The Shades of Life

Who would say that in the field
There was so much company,
That in the shades of life
Are moments of utopia,

That the dead would live,
That the living would kill,
That the eyes would lie?
Yes, life—the irony.

The steps of each day
Contained my life,
The most beautiful qualities
And confused, transient visits.

For moments of insanity,
For moments of bitterness,
This life, short life,
Lies within the shades.

❖ *Cristina Jacome*

Confussed

It's the confused and confussed nature of the wild rain
Eating it's way through meadows of unused regurgitation,
While revolving ambience will gradually give way to a stored book of newer times.

It's easy seeing what needs to be had with obligation and subtlety
Remembering that only tomorrow you won't have the ability to forget her.
It's the punishment for seeing greener grass.

Take away that ground only to be left with nothing but the notoriously greedy undertakers.
They've tricked you, by imprinting your reasons with wrath and foreshadowing
Seeping inwards I feel as though it's not firing my rage, but only suppressing it for as long as can.
Be done without drowning myself out with the mass noises of confusion.

Confussed is the word of my choice.
Word filled with everything that means nothing to you.
It's a fleeting horoscope of yet to come,
But in the nature of the oblivious, the fool goes on.

❖ *Chris Kubrick*

Desert Memories

Across the horizon there is nothing. Well, very little to my seven-year-old untrained eyes, anyway. A few cacti, some sagebrush and a lonely cedar sparsely punctuate my side of the road. My mind wanders aimlessly as my brothers and sisters play 50 States, the license plate game that all kids seem to discover on long road trips. A blue station wagon passes and someone yells, "Colorado! I have Colorado!" I lean closer to the window, feeling more alone than I have ever felt before.

We stop at a Stuckies for a bathroom break. The familiar long white building with the peak over the door is not comforting this day. And neither is their multi-flavored taffy's they sell. I don't want to get back in the car and fight the urge to run into the desert in the opposite direction, back toward Phoenix. Back to the familiar. Back to home.

I don't even remember the reason my parents gave for uprooting and relocating my family to the desert in upstate Arizona. Is the reason really important after the action has been taken? This action would change not only my physical location--where I was, but where I was going, and eventually who I would become.

Adventure soon found me, as I became acclimated to this strange place. My curiosity increased with time and I began to explore more of the surrounding area.

On one of my first voyages I discovered a strange creature that resembled a *really tiny* dinosaur. The body was circular and flat, and there were thorny ridges down both of its sides. There were several small thorny looking horns running from its blunt snout along the outside rim of its skull leading to the two larger horns on both sides. The skin on its back was brown, with matching sets of black and white camouflage spots, two rows running down its back and along the tail. The skin on its back was scaly, yet the skin on the stomach the skin was almost smooth. And from head to tail was only about six inches long.

Breathless with my discovery of a long extinct species, I ran back to the trailers to get something to cage my discovery in. In my hurry to describe this odd creature, I babbled something to my mother in reference to my discovery, grabbed a shoebox and ran back out to capture my new pet. Upon my return I discovered my new friend was gone. Suddenly I became Encyclopedia Brown, and I started to look for the trail his feet and tail would have made on the sand around the sagebrush where I had left him. The problem with this was there were *a lot* of creatures that left trails in the desert sand, and an almost constant wind that blows the sand and almost invariably erases those tracks.

I was in luck this time-- I found the trail the creature left and followed it about twenty yards or so. Then disaster struck. Literally. In my concentration to locate my discovery, I had become so intense on following the trail left by this animal, I wasn't paying attention to the plants around me. I had walked a little too close to a "jumping cactus," and the cactus had released its quills: right into my ankle. The Teddy Bear Cholla reacted to the vibrations of my footsteps and, in a protective measure, released its quills.

The stinging in my ankle turned into burning and became inflamed: not only was my ankle swelling quickly, it felt as if burning needles were being repeatedly jabbed into my ankle. The pain was so severe I couldn't walk, I had to crawl home to have the needles removed. It was the longest "walk" I have ever experienced.

After I reached home, and my mother had removed the cactus needles from my ankle, by this time so swollen I couldn't walk on it, I had totally forgotten my discovery. I remained unable to walk the next day, but was able to hobble around by the third day. As the pain in my ankle slowly subsided, I remembered the reason I walked by the "jumping cactus" in the first place. I described this discovery to my brother, who didn't believe my story about this fascinating creature. We plotted a return to the place where I found the creature before, as soon as I could get around better.

On the fourth day, the swelling had subsided and most of the pain was gone, so off we went in search of my discovery. I showed him the sagebrush I last saw the strange creature, but there were no more tracks to follow. As we looked around, making sure to avoid the evil Teddy Bear Cholla. Suddenly, I saw it. I yelled "there it is!" and excitedly pointed at the creature. We began chasing the creature, and eventually caught him, placing him into the shoebox I had brought the last time.

We could barely contain ourselves as we rushed home to share our catch with the rest of the family. As we rushed in, we excitedly showed my discovery with everyone that was home, asking if they knew what this strange creature was. No one did.

Finally, my father came home. He, in my seven-year-old mind, the keeper of all knowledge, would surely know what this unusual animal was. Alas, he didn't disappoint me. He explained this was a variation of a lizard, commonly referred to as a "horny toad." And, much to my mother's relief, he said it wasn't poisonous.

Every day that we had left of that summer, my brother and I, careful of all cacti, but especially the dreaded "jumping cactus," searched for other unusual life forms. We found several other different creatures,

but nothing could compare to the magic of our first "horny toad."

The horse that ate locoweed came into the trailer one day. It was a hot July morning right before my birthday and I was playing in the hole my father had dug in the sand to use to burn our garbage. The incinerator was about four feet deep and ten-foot square. As I enjoyed my secret game of detective, I heard a scream and then our dogs began barking like there was something really wrong, like they were trying to scare off an intruder or something, and all the while my mother is yelling things I couldn't understand, but by the tone I could tell she was both mad and scared.

I climbed out of the incinerator, not an easy task, as the sandy sides kept crumbling under the exertion of my eight-year-old legs in my effort to get to my mother as fast as I possibly could. As I rounded the trailer closest to the incinerator I slid to a stop and had to fight the urge to laugh. There in the doorway that opened into the living room of the second trailer, the room that served as my parents bedroom, was Princess, her head out the door peering quizzically at my mother, with her head tilted to one side as if trying to understand her. My mother, with her intense fear of horses, had been awakened in terror by a horse in her bedroom, sniffing at her as she was sleeping.

Here she was in her nightgown, standing almost against the opposite trailer, yelling at the horse to get out of the trailer, more specifically *her* bedroom, all the while the dogs were standing between the horse and my mother barking their warning to the horse to stay away from my mother, effectively blocking the exit from the trailer. And I'm standing at the opposite end of the trailers trying not to laugh and desperately trying to figure out a solution to the dilemma my mother is experiencing and all I can think is "She is going to be mad if I laugh. She is going to be mad if I laugh..."

My two oldest brothers had gone on a "hunting expedition" that morning, using homemade bow and arrow sets they had crafted from cedar branches and real Indian arrowheads that they found that were fairly abundant in the desert sand. Jackrabbits were fairly common in the area, and my brothers' fondest wish was to be the provider of the main ingredient in a big pot of rabbit stew.

In their hurry to begin their hunt, they didn't make sure the back door closed tightly. Wind gusts are quite common in the northern Arizona desert, and after having the door slam into the side of the trailer one too many times, my father had placed "silencers" on all of the doors: he had attached rubber to the knobs and padding to the trailer sides where they connected,

silencing the noise that would have alerted my mother to her impending visit.

Princess was an abandoned horse that roamed the desert where we lived on our own forty acres. Legend had it that Princess had consumed locoweed, *Astragalus allochorus* Grey, also known as Halfmoon loco weed, a local indigenous plant that caused animals to go "insane," and had actually become violent and uncontrollable. As a result, she was set free to roam the desert and fend for herself. Her previous owner had no use for her anymore and he didn't care to spend the money on a veterinarian to put the horse down. My oldest brother had an affinity for horses, an obsession might be a better description, actually, and began trying to tame this neglected and abandoned animal. He had succeeded in feeding Princess, and as a result she allowed my brother to touch and pet her. Now, as a direct result of these efforts, Princess was inside the trailer, my mother was outside the trailer, and I was struggling to decide what to do to help the situation.

About this time my brothers rounded the corner of the trailer, weapons in the hands of one, a rabbit in the hands of the other, and curious as to the cause of the commotion. Suddenly I was no longer the only one that could find a solution-- the person responsible for the whole dilemma was here now, and he could help figure this one out.

My brother decided that since my oldest brother was the only one that could get Princess to come to him, he and I would remove the dogs from the situation, thus allowing my oldest brother to get close enough to princess to feed her her favorite snack, sugar cubes. If he could get close enough to her to feed her, he could remove her from the trailer.

The plan worked and in a short time Princess was out of the trailer, my brothers were cleaning the rabbit, and I was back to playing detective in the desert.

Snow was coming. We heard it on the radio of the old paneled station wagon on the way home from town. Sometimes the twenty-mile drive sometimes just flew by, and other times it just seem to take a week out of my life. This day I was lost in the fantasy of snow in the desert, so it was the fastest ride I had experienced yet. Snow in the desert. Wow. I didn't even know it snowed in the desert. The time I had spent here has taken me on some incredible journeys into the unknown, and from the sounds of it, it wasn't about to let up.

When we arrive home, the oldest four of my brothers and sisters had gone on a walk. As we unloaded the groceries, my mother found the note on the table. "They'll be home before dark" my mother

told my brother and me. There was about an hour before dark, and the clouds were beginning to slowly fill the sky, so my brother and I went outside to watch for the snow.

My brother and I were playing in the space between the two trailers we lived in when three of my brothers and sisters return. My oldest sister, Teri, rushed into the trailer in a panic and told my mother my Barbara, my twelve year old sister, was missing, that she had become separated from the rest while they were in the cedar grove behind our trailers shortly after they left, around three hours before.

My mother, trying not to panic, began to formulate a plan. My father would be home from work soon, and she wouldn't be able to get any help until then, so she instructed my older siblings spread out in front of the cedar grove--with direct orders *not* to enter--calling her name. If she was within hearing distance, she would hear and follow their voices out of the grove and back home safely.

As dusk began to fall, my father finally came home and was filled in on the details. The snow had started to fall. My father soon left again, this time to find some help in forming a search party. Because of our remote location we had no electricity, running water, and no telephone.

I watched my father leave in his green "56 Chevy in the twilight of the desert evening. The image of light snow that fell between me and the red taillights of the old truck formed silhouettes of the cactus became indelibly etched upon my mind. As did the image of my mother, sitting beside the window in the light of the kerosene lamp that sat on the dining room table, her outlined form seems to dance as the flame of the lamp flickers. I knew she was crying.

The snow began to fall in earnest around eight o'clock, and my father had not returned yet. My mother sent both my brother, who was just eight months older than myself, and me to bed and tells us not to worry. We went to our trailer, but we didn't go to bed. We watched out the window of my parents room, hoping to see something.

Around eleven, my father returned, with a deputy from the Navaho county sheriff's department, but not Barbara. The deputy questioned my older brothers and sisters. As he left, my oldest brother accompanied him. I became even more afraid. There was now about four inches of snow on the ground and the wind was beginning to pick up speed. This could possibly become a blizzard.

By midnight the wind was howling around the trailer, and the snow ass still falling. In the distance the faint glow of headlights has become visible. As we watched out the window that was now smudged by both tears of fear and condensation from the

temperature difference inside and outside the trailer, we see it is not the sheriff's car because the lights are too high and close together. It is a truck, a Jeep actually, and there are three passengers.

An old man gets out of the driver's side, fighting the wind to get the door open. He circled the jeep in front and opens the passenger side door. My sister climbed out wrapped in a tattered Navaho blanket, followed by my brother that had left with the deputy.

My mother exploded out of the door, enfolding my sister in her arms as only a relieved mother can. Tears were reflected the headlights of the jeep, and not only in the eyes of my family, but the driver of the jeep as well.

The next morning I woke up to seven inches of snow, a deeper love for my family and a new found respect for nature in general and the desert in specific. As vast and open as it first seemed, I realized that there were places within that vastness that could swallow one whole if they didn't show proper respect to the desert. I woke up that morning a whole new person.

❖ *Joseph King*

Cyberwomb

My cyclopic eye searches
Datastreams for a particle
Of truth, ones and zeros
Painting digital frescos
Through cathode rays, only
Finding neutron narcosis.
Bad computer karma
Uninvents me—
I am lost; techno junkie
Swallowed by electrical
Leviathan, and the
Cryptic harbinger prophesizes
Serial cables for sweat socks
And silicon stigmata through
The wrists of heretics.
When human skin means anomaly
And iridescent eyelets open
Doors to vaulted memories,
I will remember spandex
And Shakespeare, vomiting
At hermaphroditic porn
And what it's like to be human,
Disown digital rapture
To whisper "nihilism"
In my lover's ear.

❖ *Scott Gibson*

a day without sunshine and too many pillows

we go up. we go down. we spin all around.
it'd be easier if we got a test
each birthday, "sorry sir, you're not ready
to be 21. try again next year."
i think i'd still be 13.
the success of idiotic youth,
the depression of self conscious footsteps.
blazed pots of left over dreams
and i'll disappear
into an empty bottle and a cloud of smoke
in only a few short years.
wanting something better, the grass may be greener
but i still feel cleaner
on my side of the fence.
time is still
squandered blabbing about i how tried
to prove i didn't care,
but that's who i was, wasn't i? i suppose
i could eat little white lies doused in whipped cream.

tired of regrets, they make me feel so slow
like i just missed my flight
and now i have to sit
in those faked comfortable seats and wait
for my next chance.
i think i'd rather sing off key and turn red
than be perfect, but when
will i accept that?
we blast into spontaneous, effortless conversations
that only lead us on
to the wall of misperception.
i think i'll go
cry and spit
out some more clichés
about stars and sore feet and thieves and heaven,
wallow in self pity
long enough and you'll never have to
clothes shopping again.

worries and insecurities
and lost chances and slaughtered words and faked laughter,
am i 13 or am i 76?
everyone has alzheimer's,
and we retell war stories
of heartache, brazen anger, and fashionably funny moments.

everything is so important
but i'm lost
in the subway.
rails and trains and
hairstyles and clothing styles and
watches and cell phones and
perfume and cologne and
swirling cups of specially flavored overpriced coffee.
is this disease? coughing all over me?
i spin and shiver in the cold
stares of old friends,
we don't share

the same stories about long brown curly hair,
and jazzy smiles, and glorious breasts bouncing,
or how we used to smile.
there's this thing called hope,
but i didn't answer my phone,
i think hope dashed away
on that last train...
pour some coffee on me,
if i turn red
that means i'm not dead, right?

worn out soles,
if you walk the streets
long enough
you start to identify
spectacular cracks
with specific thoughts.
the bottoms of my shoes tell all my stories.

we bask in the glow of self
mutilation, hipness
cloned from shallowness,
swallow a horse pill
of popularity, choke
on the aftermath
and meet in amsterdam
to talk over some more overpriced specially flavored coffee.
back to the subway, spinning
among people
i thought i ignored, shivering
inside my clothes, attacked
by goosebumps of nervousness,
i'm not ready to be these people's center of attention.
you and i should just dance alone
in the snow so we leave
footprints and our breaths' steam can fight
underneath the streetlight
while my off-key humming will keep us amused.

wanting what we don't have
is never enough.
sticker prices and large corporations,
i'm looking to find a single thread.
do you want to join me
as i go tip over some cows?
we can laugh as they moo,
like me, stuck on my side
mooing at myself
and never asking for help.
i don't think it matters
if i try to get back up,
some random idiot will push me down
so he can laugh.
it's all some cycle, a laundry machine
of daily adventures,
and i spent my last quarter hoping
to finally feel fresh
and clean.
soap in my ears and i'm barking
like some old gaffer who forgot
to get new batteries for his hearing aid.

(a day without sunshine... continued)

sadness of a parent
who outlives a child,
the ache of a need
to swim with clouds
as we all choke
out tears, loud sniffs, hacks, and too many ummmms.
we like to think
we cover ourselves
so well, a hidden rainforest of sorrow, i suppose
we're all broken enough
to ignore the cracks.

doorways to yesterday
and i still wander
the maze of 16 years old.
sideburns and driver's license
and the glory of burping out buddhism and punk rock.
a disaster looking to hide,
we spilled our lips
on the sugarcoated lust
of imagined unclothed beauty.
handpieces of style,
a patchwork of handicapped loving, and i suppose
we felt complete.

do i strut
or do i duck
away from excellence?
cherish the ability to ignore
the fitted hat of demanded perfection,
expect if from all others.
we can enjoy the smog
of numb smiles with numb people eating numb food over
numb conversations
and our teeth
will look coated in every dingy photograph we bother
smiling for,
i suppose i must learn to appreciate breathing.

she said two wrongs don't make a right and i laughed
because i knew that
i had forgotten
both valentine's day and her birthday.
we look for the red
inside each other's eyes
and smell sweaty, horny, over wanting hands.
do you remember
the joy
of reaching under for the first time?
we perform a cordial dance
of acceptance, a creation within
painstaking smiles,
the desire to hide
amongst dancing sunflowers mingling with tingling breezes,
the chant of chance
kept covered by wispy dying beautiful white helicopters
of ancient dandelions. True believers of sin
and together we lie
in this bed of oblivion.

later i scrounged around
her porch waiting to watch her lips
drip crimson as she devoured
my scrambled egg heart.
i suppose i could cry but i'm too tired
to remember
i fell apart
so i'll say a prayer
of ignorance instead.

i flushed my brain
candy down the toilet
and giggled
as it swirled and swirled and gargled
itself away.
i flounder with giddiness
as she strolls along,
a gust of wind
and she trips
over those damn invisible cracks
and i know i'll be sleeping alone
tonight. i suppose things could be said

a last dance
with swirling snowflakes,
alone in bed,
one last trip to denounce everything
i've hidden inside
hedonism's closet.
slashed pillow cases
and pools of water,
we splash away to happiness, a destination
needs no path.
please call me
when we meet there
so i can remind you that i miss you.
should you get lost,
digest the song of yourself
and you will find me
dancing with walt and lennon, laughing
at all that is blessed.

❖ joel lee

Yellow Tattoos

I've been proposed to support,
A rugged tabletop holding the coffee's imperfect sailors,
Assailing the modern tragedy,
They eat the consumption from those who consume.

Wrathing like seamen in dried imagination,
What happened to the process of colored invention?
Instead it's been momentarily distilled,
Branded inside yellow tattooed factories, nestled by comfortable smoke stacks.

Prizes in nature's hollow map of destiny,
I'm tired, rather from you
Vulnerability is stronger than conviction ,
What a waste; I'd rather recycle my thoughts.

For a scarred index of ignorant status,
At least then the pain doesn't hurt.

❖ Chris Kubrick

Powdered

my heart has shattered
like crystal
and now marches
like a mob
through my veins
shredding me
it travels
like a throng
of adorning fans
through my arteries
exfoliating me
from the inside out

❖ Holly Loeffler

The Hero

The hero walks in
Stooped, not bent, lowers himself to chair With
a hand on the armrest,
The other on the desk.
He slides open the window.
There's a cat on the sill, most times;
He opens the screen too
And lets it in.
He pulls a cigareete and cups it
To his face.
The lighter's flame is pale,
Weak by the window.
He leans back to the desk,
From the side where he sits.
The amber ashtray makes a noise
As it is dragged across the desktop
Like the flint made before,
Only for longer.
He sits with the cigarette for
A while, then sets it down.
There's a ribbon of smoke that goes
Up or out or
Back from the window,
As the wind wails.
He looks out the window, south-east.
Always up and south-eats, over the shoulder
Of the mountain.
The light is tired,
More colorless than white.

It brings out more gray and white in his hair
Than another light would show,
And gives each
And every
Hair a shadow.
His cheek is a stiff grey forest
With stiff black shadows.
The chair rocks, grudgingly:
He reaches back to the smoke.
He turns his head down
And east through the floor on the first drag,
Then looks back out the window.
His brows gather: he squints
As he smokes.
It is finished.
He stubs, rubs it out.
This time, as he turns,
His whole body twists to the window
Knees and chest and eyes
Looking up and south-east.
The hero
Puts weathered hand
On weathered hand
On wooden armrest.
His face tilts, and the light
Runs down his left again.

❖ Benjamin Knox

Boy (my apologies to Jamaica Kincaid)

Mow and bag the grass on Saturday and throw it in the compost heap; spread the mulch on Sunday and throw the rest in the compost heap; take your shirt off in the sun; eat your vegetables, they put hair on your chest; dirty clothes is the sign of a man doing man's work; when buying two-by-fours to build a deck for the house, be sure that they aren't warped or have knots, because that way they won't hold up well in the weather; let primer dry overnight before you apply the first coat of paint; is it true that you sing in the school choir?; always eat two servings of food so that others know you have a man's appetite; in school try to walk like a man and not like the queer you are bent on becoming; don't sing in the school choir; you must speak to sluts, because they will get you laid faster; eat that apple you dropped on the ground—dirt has protein; *but I don't sing in the school choir*; this is how to hit a nail; this is how to lay a shingle with the nail you have just learned to hit; this is how to dress like a real man so that you can prevent yourself from looking like the queer I know you are so bent on becoming; this is how you throw a football to your father so he doesn't think your wrist is limp; this is how you cut down a tree—tie a rope to another tree in the opposite direction of the house, because you never know which way a tree could fall; this is how you change your oil; this is how you change your tires; this is how you change the starter in a car with a blown head gasket; this is how you shake hands; this is how you shake hands with someone you don't like too much; this is how you shake hands with someone you don't like at all; this is how you shake hands with someone you like completely; this is how you will dress for work; this is how you will act at work; this is how you will act when your company gets a visit from corporate management; this is how you will act when you come home from work; this is how you have to behave in the presence of men who don't know you very well, and this way they won't recognize immediately the queer I have warned you against becoming; be sure to work out every day, even if you have a broken neck; squat down to play marbles—you are not a girl, you know; don't egg people's houses; you'll get your ass kicked; don't shoot bee-bees at blackbirds, because it will attract animals; this is how to build a doghouse; this is how to stay out of the doghouse; this is how to pretend the prime rib you just ate was wonderful; this is how to not take medicine when you are sick; this is how to convince your girlfriend to find a doctor who will throw away your child before your parents find out, even though it proves you are not queer; this is how to shoot a buck; this is how to leave a buck and take its rack, because you need a trophy; this is how to bully a woman; this is how a woman ruins your life; this is how to love a woman, and if that doesn't work there are other ways, and if they don't work there are still prostitutes; this is how to drink so much that you forget the day; this is how to pretend that you were at work late instead of the bar; always make a woman do what you want; *but what if a woman won't do what I want?*; you mean to say that after all you are really going to be the kind of man whose woman won't do what you want?

❖ Scott Gibson

Our Stay at the Lake

We woke to the sound of the alarm clock. It was not yet dawn, but there was light coming in from the street lamp. The car was loaded and running. I whistled to the dog with coffee in hand, and we were on our way.

The dust circled behind us while we joked about a few bumps in the road. Things hadn't changed too much this year. The leaves were full of color looking like a patchwork quilt spread across the hillsides. This was also the first time no children were asking, "Are we there yet?"

Waiting there as before stood the same cabin we had come to for years. Steve, the caretaker, had been busy since our last visit, as there was a new roof and a fresh coat of paint. Opening the car door you could smell fall around us. We unloaded the car and got settled in, for tomorrow was another day and the real reason for our being there.

We could hear the sounds of our intended target landing on the lake just off the dock. I knew I was not going to get any sleep. I must have looked at the clock a dozen times during the night. There was no need to set the damn thing—I was awake. The smell of fresh brewed coffee was hitting the bedroom door like a heavy hand. Steve is here; time to get up. I put on my robe and went to greet our old friend. The three of us shared events of the past year. Dawn would be here soon, and we needed to be in our cloak of cover before it arrived.

I slipped on my faded camouflage and laced up my waterproof boots. With one last check to make sure we had our ammo, and we were out the door. Only the beam from the penlight illuminated the way. Something struck me strange. It seemed to be a longer walk this time. Once settled in our hiding place, I whispered if anyone else had noticed that the lake seemed farther away. Steve explained, "There has been a reshaping of the lake." Mother Nature had not been kind to the area; the lack of rain was drying up the lake and the wetlands.

As the sunlight was starting to peak over the far end of the lake we could see just what Steve was talking about. The lake did seem different. The sound of once lapping water hitting her stony edge was softer this year. The vegetation around the lake was also different, and there was no longer a lush carpet of green. As we sat there we wondered how the lake felt about giving up a part of herself.

Loud bangs of shotguns were ringing out across the lake, and their echoes seemed to last forever. He had a job to do and there were geese to capture. We

could now hear the flapping of their wings growing louder and louder.

Looking down for a moment I double-checked my equipment. I could hear the beat of my own heart. The moment I had been waiting for all year had come. My finger was now on the trigger and geese were in the crosshairs of my lens. A gentle squeeze of the shutter button allowed me to wait for just the right moment. As more of the geese came around the bend, I held up my camera trying to capture more of them on film. A small group landed right in front of us as if to say, "Here we are." The sound of gunfire was still all around us. We knew that some of our targets were also being harvested, not on film but from the heat of birdshot.

The lake was changing and was no longer going to be the place of solitude we enjoyed each year. The mud and log dam the beaver once worked so diligently to build was soon to be replaced with concrete and metal. New houses would be built on the south end shore. The lake, where people and nature could become one, would be changed forever. The geese would no longer be welcome. It is hard to sell new houses with goose shit on the windows.

I had captured all I wanted on film, so I stayed near the cabin. There were already enough hunters on the lake that week. Each day passed with more and more gunfire. The flocks of geese were slowly being thinned out. I was glad the hunters could spare some of the geese from what lay ahead, the unkindness of land development to wildlife.

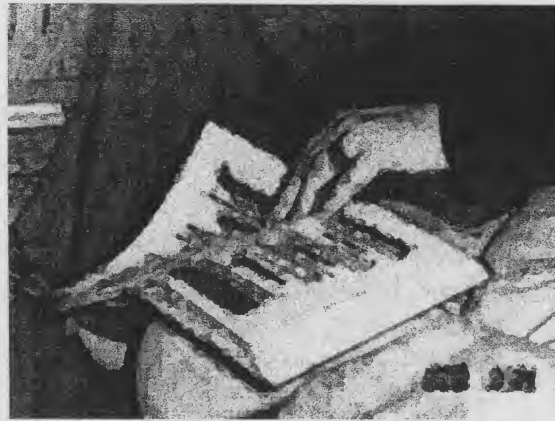
Soon our week at the lake had come to an end. We again woke to the sound of an alarm clock. With one last sweep of the cabin, we took longer this year to say good-bye. We both knew it was our last time at the lake. We would get together and see Steve again next year but in a different place. Dust from the dirt road circled behind us. There were no jokes this time on the road, only silence. I reflected on the hunters wondering if they too were on their way home. How thankful I was that the gees they harvested would not have to endure the changes forthcoming. They would be spared the indignities of progress. I was also thankful for my own trophies—not mounts of flesh like the hunters, but mounts on paper to be framed and placed on the wall for all to see as last remembrances of a place forever changed.

❖ Penny Streeter

Suicide

As a man contemplates death from
A 5th street high rise,
A young child is crying over spilled milk
That just splattered on the brand new carpet.
The saddening thought of the long fall plays
Over and over in the man's mind.
Thinking about the first step to the end.
The time when nothing is there to catch
His fall.
He warned them not to come any closer,
But they didn't listen.
And so he started to walk—
As he hyper extends his leg over the ledge,
He suddenly thinks about giving up.
How he would miss his family who didn't
Realize what was happening because
They were on a different TV station.
So the man turns to the police for help
Back to life,
But he realizes that his foot is slipping
On the wetness from the rain
Earlier that morning.
As he smacks his chin on the concrete,
His eyes fall into his head,
But he's not out.
He experiences the unoxidized wind force
Created by the earth's gravity.
His eyes begin to water
As his mouth becomes dry.
The man gets scared before impact,
Having images with life without him,
He hits.
The impact is so intense that a businessman
A half-mile away feels
The tremble of the man's head crashing
On the brick which had broken.
He realizes that he is not quite dead
But severely mangled
As his feet lie next to his mouth.

❖ *Ian Cooper*



I'm Waiting For...

Freddy Fender's tear drop to fall
for Fats Domino to find his thrill
in Margaritaville.

For Garth Brooks and Jane Austen to marry
and invite all of their "friends in low places"
to Pemberly.

I'm Waiting For...

My Silverado to be the chariot that Maid Marian
uses to spin rocks
in Robin Hood's face.

For the answer to "Why has thou forsaken me?"
to appear in an unedited version of the Bible
at the dollar store.

I'm Waiting For...

William Blake's plates to be a spectacle of the local museum,
where the halls are lines with
the reasons Rosetti painted.

For Mom and Pop's bookstore to have a David Sedaris signing,
an all day William Wordsworth
reading, with free Starbucks for all.

I'm Waiting For...

The chance to tell my story
for Paul Harvey to tell the real story
and for the President to tell
"the rest of the story."

❖ *Bobbi Button*

The Mother

She's so cold. Hiding in the closet again, she calls it her womb. Irony, she despises her mother for being such a fucking coward. She's staining the carpet with her blood again. This little corner will never come clean. Luckily, she hides away her boxes of notes over the stains. It's not like he wants to see what those say. She's quivering; fright, guilt, sadness, pain... is it any different right now? Pressed against the deepest corner, she moans quietly. The tears fall. Do they cleanse? Do they only provide her with more suffering? Her father beat the shit out of her mother; she remembers that. Swore to the mirror it would never happen to her. Where did her mother go after the beatings? Fuck, does it really matter? Here she is in the closet. Take a photograph; is it she or her mother?

Yeah, her mother used to say her father didn't really mean it. Did she actually believe those lies? Stupid fucking 50s woman. How the hell could mother get so mad at the drug use? At least her happiness was in the drugs, a true form of fantasy. Mother just hid away in repression, denying the existence of pain. She's in denial now in the womb's corner. She is her mother.

At 16 years old, he said he loved her. She believed him. She believed him when she was piecing her lip back together and wondering what to do about the black eye. She believed him when she was hiding bruises with those nasty long sleeve t-shirts. She believed him when she took the drugs to disappear. Her head felt so clear, especially after he slapped her. Did he smile then?

She was pretty; she knew that. But, what is beautiful that smiles that cracked smile that says, "I'm - desperate. Please love me." She'd like to blame her father. It'd be so damn easy. She remembers the beatings. He hardly ever hit her; he always hit mother. Mother's face would move in grotesque slow motion as his hand struck her face. She could watch her mother's face collapse underneath the stinging blow; her lips flowed in directions that made it look like a distorted laugh. Mother's eyes bulged, then closed, then flowed. Her nose rose in the air. How dare mother look down upon father. He would punch mother in the stomach, doubling her over. He would scream about mother being a whore, a slut, a hooker, a bitch, a cunt. She didn't understand all those words. Mother would be on her knees, choking back tears and swallowing blood. He would scream more, asking if mother liked being on her knees. Did mother like what she saw? Did mother suck everyone's dick? Her mother always said father didn't mean it. She used to wonder if the scars on mother thought the same thing.

At 19, she got married. She didn't think he would keep hitting her. Mother never said anything about it; mother knew though. She knew mother knew. Now she's in her womb crying, hiding, and pretending the drugs will make everything better. She is her mother.

They had two kids, a boy and a girl. A fucking wonderfully typical American family. So content in their crowded apartment. She used to ask if they could find a bigger place; she'd then go about the chore of putting her body back in functioning order.

This process of putting herself in order every time this happens brings back the same nightmares, the same sick reality. Back to back generations of punching bags for wannabe pathetic boxers. Inside she can scream the shallow hollow screams of a desperate, dying woman. She can't feel whole anymore. She doesn't even know what the fuck whole means.

When she was eight she walked into the bathroom and found her father masturbating. She didn't know what he was doing. He screamed at her to leave. She later found her mother sprawled on the floor bleeding on spilled vegetables, green (crimson) beans. She has yet to forgive herself for that.

Two years later, she did it again. He made her sit there and watch him until he finished, that sick fucker. He said it would teach her something. He screamed that her mother was a whore. Her mother couldn't walk for two days after that night. She can't forgive herself for that.

She is her mother. Fuck. Her ears ring in shame. Her ears bleed from too many hits. It drops to her shoulder. A leaky faucet of pain. She remembers making the promise to the mirror. She was thirteen. She tied her hair in a ponytail. A type of defiance, or so she thought. She was naked. She felt ashamed and free. She liked herself. She pointed and said she would never have scars that screamed "I am coward, please accept me. I am coward, please help me." She would never feel that way. She would never exist as her mother, a prayer missing amen, a wish to die, too scared to leave. Now she's in her womb, bleeding, scars screaming and praying to God to let her go, but forgetting the complete amen; it turns into a moan...ooooohhhh man. She is her mother, action for action, word for word.

She learned to cover herself with make-up, just like her mother. It always lied with the mirror. She felt incompletely together. A touch here and there turned into habit. The day never started until she showered off crusted blood and put on her make-up mask. She could face the world, but she never left the house. The television helped her believe in hope. When it shut off

she cried; why did she bother believing hope? Such a waste of energy. She needed that energy to withstand the attacks. Did he smile then?

Fuck. She got blood on one her dresses in the closet. She couldn't see it; she could only feel it. She knew the feel of blood on clothes. She knew the taste of blood. She knew the feeling of it coming back up. She knew the torture of keeping it quiet. She had choked herself to exhaustion as she tried to hide it from him. What to do about the blood on the dress? She knew how to get stains out, but it wasn't time for laundry. He might see it before then. She didn't know why he cared. He hardly ever took her out. Only once in a while to prove that he could.

FUCK YOU. FUCK YOU. FUCK YOU. FUCK YOU. She finally hits back. His nose is bleeding. His teeth are loose. She's screaming FUCK YOU for the neighbors to hear. He's bleeding on his shirt. He has bitten his tongue. Blood slides out his mouth, the snake of revenge. Fuck. She wakes up sweating...

The house was so typical. Everything always so typical. White with window shutters. Nice front door. Always mowed lawn. Two nice oak trees. A little flowerbed. She didn't know when mother took care of it. Inside, they had all the proper furniture. Top-of-the-line new stuff. Perfect consumers of the after war generation. Her friends could feel the "home goodness." Smells of dinner wafted through the house everyday at 5:00 pm. Every fucking day at 5:00pm. 5:00pfuckingm. Never different unless father demanded it. That never happened. The drill sergeant of dinnertime. Same meals, same day of the week. "Do not argue." "You have no voice." "Shut the hell up." "Eat the god damn food I provide you ungrateful bitch." Typical shouts at her 10 year old rebellion. Typical just like those after school TV movies about abusive fathers she sees now. Overdramatic bullshit her husband says. That's not real life.

It's always so typical. Her father beating her mother was typical. It was atypical for him to do it in a way that showed. Only when he flipped would he strike her in the face. She always witnessed those. Maybe. She would try to block them out. Maybe she only saw one and it forever replayed in her mind. Did it really matter? It seemed so typical, her room, her bed, her clothes, her friends. He worked hard to keep it that way. Maybe her mother bled to keep it that way.

She used to climb the oak trees to escape. Hiding away in inside the leaves. Winter left her exposed to the cold reality. She couldn't escape in beauty. The tears dropped slowly into the snow. Tiny indentations of defeat. Behind the leaves, though, she would sing. She thought herself a bird to sing with. They chirped their melancholic song and prayed to forget their childhood demise. The bird was a cocky blue jay,

forgotten in his nest after he refused to sing the right song. Now they are best friends. A lovely couple: the defeated child and her successfully rebellious blue jay of imagination.

She feels that worrying equals a weakness. Throughout the pieces of these dashed dreams, she can create a van gogh picture of remorse glued by her blood and tears. Is it cliché? She doesn't care anymore. How could she? She likes to pass out on the couch. She drifts away on her favorite aspirin cloud. She's allowed to spend his money on her habit because he thinks it keeps her quiet. It will keep her on the couch during the day. She won't be out to talk to other people. Did her mother do this when she was at school? Was that why the couch was so worn out? Did she ever catch her mother on the couch? Not that she can remember. Her mother never dared to rest when someone was in the house.

Why does she keep thinking of her mother? Why won't it go away? She's tired of dealing with her mother. She is her mother. Fuck.

Her mother is nothing anymore. Mother's a haggard woman with the blue hair of wannabe young hipster. Mother's finally living free. Her father died a few years ago. She forgot to cry for him. She cried afterwards that he bothered to orgasm into her mother. She doesn't know if she hates him. Does it really matter if she does or doesn't? Did he not rape her of this life? Maybe that's her husband. Fuck. Mother. She is her mother. Fuck. She doesn't know if she'll survive to dye her hair blue.

The passion of this life regrets evoking her voice to speak. The hospital bill was so big he beat her worse when she finally came back. Then he remembered his job had medical insurance. Fucking moron made her bleed so bad she left crimson pools of regret anywhere she could make herself crawl. She hid behind her vomit. Once she did that he stopped. It sickened him. Fucking bastard. She hates him. She won't leave him. Why does he beat her? It's a shrill cry in her nightmares that she can't answer. Why won't she leave him? She won't answer the question because it makes her temples pulsate, pounding out the steady slap of his hand. We're both such fucking cowards is her favorite thought. Sadness prevails even in these aspirin dreams. She can't escape. She won't allow herself to escape. She can't dye her hair blue. She won't survive that long.

She feels his face crumple underneath her fist. His nose is bleeding. His teeth are loose. She's screaming FUCK YOU for the neighbors to hear. He's bleeding on his shirt. He has bitten his tongue. Blood slides out his mouth, the snake of revenge. Fuck. She wakes up sweating...

There was a time when things made sense. Maybe. Maybe nothing ever made sense. She'd like to

put her thoughts in order, but he never gives her time. She wonders if pieces of her brain have given up hope, chained to the broken pieces of her skull. Maybe her brain doesn't move when he bashes her head. Maybe her brain has already committed suicide. Maybe...fuck, she's tired of maybe. It's always been about maybe. Maybe she'll leave the womb, maybe she'll leave the apartment, maybe she'll get to dye her hair blue. Maybe she's already dead.

Where are the kids? Who are her kids? Damn, she hates when she can't remember their names.

People might take pity on me, she thinks, if I bothered to leave the apartment. The world always seems so cruel on the news. Why would I want to go out there? They wouldn't even understand. Nobody seemed to understand mother. Did mother even talk to anyone? Fuck her mother. Fuck her father. Fuck her fake blue jay. Fuck her husband. Fuck her kids. Fuck her life. Fuck her future blue hair. Fuck....

There's no stopping. She supposes she could do something. Why ruin the fate of defeat? It's as easy to forget the hope of healing as it is to heal her cuts. Lies, all fucking lies, she knows this. She can scream at herself forever, but why should she do it alone, when he'll scream at her too? Forever, together, they can be screaming partners, cementing her need for defeat.

Have there been times of peace? Maybe some time considered calm; yeah, when she drifts away on her favorite cloud. She knows it's desperation. She has conversations with her desperation. Maybe it's her blue jay...

"Why are you here again?"

"Where else should I go?"

"Go back to the oak tree..."

"I don't like trees anymore."

"You lie."

"No, no, no...no I don't."

"You lie."

"What should I do?"

"Leave."

"I don't know how."

"Leave."

"I don't know how."

"Then why are you here again?"

"This is my escape."

"Then you know how to leave."

"How do I leave for good?"

"I'm leaving now." Time for a few more aspirin.

Her desperation is always in the aspirin, but it doesn't always talk. Not after it leaves her grasping for more pills; more pills, more desperate calm.

There's something funny about her mother's blue hair; she refuses to say it's blue. Mother always comes up with some lavish moronic name for it.

Mother's celebrating her freedom with creating stupid names for colors. Because mother can.

She can pretend each day is New Year's, a celebration with hope for the future. But, it only leaves her tackling the toilet, whimpering through heavens. Nobody would ever believe it could be this bad. Nobody ever sees her. Maybe they would believe her. Fuck maybe. There is no maybe anymore. Maybe she'll be able to create moronic names for colors. Maybe she doesn't breathe anymore. Maybe she is turning blue trying to inhale through these heavens.

She never gets tired of cowering in the corner of her closet. Maybe this is escape. Fucking maybe. In the corner, she likes to think. She thinks of Christmas. She knew what those were: getting presents so she felt typical. But at least she could pretend to laugh. Her lilting laugh would crack with a squeal and then she'd shut her mouth. Father didn't like it. He only allowed it on Christmas. Maybe it was another, extra present to her.

She knows the feel of the corner. It's safety. He doesn't come in here after her. She doesn't know why. Maybe he feels bad. Fucking maybe. So tired of maybe. Maybe is the bane of her brain. Her shoulder fits nicely into the corner. She can slide into it and disappear. It's almost as calming as the aspirin. Maybe she should combine them. The corner talks to her too.

"Why are you here again?"

"Where should I go?"

"Leave."

"I don't know how. Can't you love me?"

"I do love you. You need to leave."

"I can't leave. I need love."

"You call that stain on the carpet love?"

"But you said you love me."

"Leave."

"I don't know how."

"I'm leaving." She pulls in closer to the corner.

She wants to feel invisible inside its warmth. Maybe that's her blood. Maybe she should leave. How can she leave? Fuck. She wants blue hair.

The corner leaves, again. Why doesn't she ever leave? Contained inside the apartment, everyday is a rehashing of that typical house childhood that leaves her sprawled out on the couch waiting for the kids to come home. Do they go to school? Or, maybe it's summer? She should pay attention more. But, she's scared to look at them. They endure this, too. They all endure it. They all bleed. Maybe it's all just her blood. Maybe they're just smeared in it because they came from her. Actually, from his cum. Maybe, just maybe, they'll get to dye their hair blue.

Was that hope? There's no hope. Why would they want to dye their hair blue? She only wants to die.

There's always a chance for excuses. She'll allow them to exist. They make it easier to deal with, or, maybe it's harder to deal with them. She doesn't really know. Why bother with thinking about them? They don't mean anything. Excuses: letters=words=sentences=his wasted breath. No, she won't accept his excuses, but that doesn't mean she can't listen to them, does it? Questions, questions, questions, it's always another question, and she knows she's not listening anymore. Listening makes her think and that's too hard now, too many bruises, too many bumps, too many cuts, too many nightmares.

Father died, mother dyed her hair blue, and now she is all alone in the closet. She knows it's time to do something, time to leave, time to say good-bye. It's all been leading up to this, but she wants an excuse. An excuse? Excuses are all lies. Thinking again, brain is bruised, maybe it'd be better after some sleep. She wants to do something, but she never has, why start now?

Yeah, the typical defeatist attitude, she's used to it. She doesn't care about the blue hair anymore. She doesn't watch afternoon specials on dysfunctional families anymore; she just drifts on her aspirin clouds. It's safe. Her kids...they're around somewhere, everywhere, someday they'll understand why nothing has ever changed. Someday they'll know why she doesn't want to have grandma's blue hair.

She didn't put make-up on this morning. She forgot. Did he beat her last night? She can't remember. Maybe he didn't. Maybe last night was a good night. Maybe they went out last night. No, she knows that didn't happen. What did happen? Why worry about it, she doesn't remember a lot of things. She probably just languished in a chair, drifting on aspirin while he watched television. What did the kids do? Probably sat around somewhere, being quiet; they were always quiet. They know what is going on, maybe they know she doesn't want to have blue hair. She knows about what he's put them through, his friends...she won't look at those memories. They're hidden behind an aspirin cloud, just like most others. Such comfort in those aspirin clouds, can't remember anything, can't remember last night.

FUCK YOU. FUCK YOU. FUCK YOU. FUCK YOU. She feels his face crumple underneath her fist. His nose is bleeding. His teeth are loose. She's screaming FUCK YOU for the neighbors to hear. He's bleeding on his shirt. He has bitten his tongue. Blood slides out his mouth, the snake of revenge. Fuck. She wakes up sweating, shaking... where is everyone right now? Quietly out of the bed, and into the hall, the kids doors are open too. How was she allowed to sleep? Oh, it must be him

and his friends...aspirin clouds...quietly into the living room, the children staring, the husband mumbling, and she sees herself hanging from the ceiling with her dyed bright blue hair.

❖ Joel Lee

Purgatory Prince

Ignite reinspired reckless
Abandon—Your child
Bursting blame
Yourself, particle parent.
Mother taught him
Money isn't everything
When it sounds like
Crippled veterans drinking
Gin in motorized carts,
Taught him soldiers
Live before they die
And perhaps you lived
Too long to fuck
A private stoned
On a sunny day.
Somewhere between
The second coming
And redemption
You crossed careless
Fingers behind your back
Out, blackout bastard,
Dancing days revisited
With fornicated fondness,
Fighting for a country where
Every child has a right
Hand break his skull
That might have been yours
To take, to make
Something of a demon
Of him at least—
Something of conviction;
Instead your purgatory prince
Likes to think
Too much, hammered
Halfway between
An ice pick and
A shoelace noose;
Counting the years
He wishes his mother's
Name were Mary—

❖ Scott Gibson

A Fine Line: A Memoir

An Introduction by The Author

However thin, there is a distinct line between oil and water. No matter the shape of the glass and no matter the amounts of each, there is always a clear separation between the two and one is always on top. The only real way to give water a chance is to shake up the two in a container. You can see the tiny bubbles of oil float around in the water separated from the large masses of oil. The water never breaks up though. It's always connected and it's the oil that loses its form. This the only time that some of the water is above some of the oil. If you wait a while, you can see the oil rise to the top where it belongs like cream and the water rests gently and quietly underneath.

Mom comes from money and you could tell by some of the things she does. Like when we would all eat together, Mom would neatly fold her napkin in her lap. She would always cut her food funny too. She would hold the meat down with her fork in her left hand and slice a small piece with her knife. She would then put her knife down and switch her fork to her right hand just to eat the tiny piece. I tried to copy her, I would even sit up straight too.

Dad ate with style. He used very little silverware at all. In fact, he only used his knife and fork. Both stayed in the same hand and either one could be used for eating or pointing. The best part was his voice control. You couldn't tell he had a single bite in his mouth when he spoke, unless you were looking at him. His napkin would stay neatly folded near his plate. He used it only to clean off his fork for desert when we had it.

The table was long and rectangular and if you knew us, you could tell where I sat just by looking up underneath the table. I sat where there was the most crayon marks and gum. My Dad sat at the end looking over everyone. Mom's spot was at Dad's right and my sister sat next to Mom. My older brother sits at the other end where I used to sit. I got moved. Dad told people that he couldn't reach me from the other end even though he never hit us. His attitude about trouble was to move it close to you so you could watch it. So, there I sat, across from Mom's soft eyes, next to Dad's pointing knife and fork, close enough to kick my sister and far enough away that I could feed the dog tuna noodle casserole with out being noticed.

Mom stayed at home taking care of other people's kids. She was there when we left and she was there when we got home. She made our lunches for us, she had dinner started and when we came home from school, our laundry was folded. This went on for years, until Dad's company started laying people off for the summer.

After, many years of running this day care out of our house, my mom decided to start a new job at the drug store. It was during the summer, so the four of us kids would have to go to my dad's parents' house. As

soon as you walked in their house, you could smell the freshly baked food mixed with oily varnish vapors from the basement. It was the smell of grandma and grandpa's house. Grandpa would answer the door breathing heavily out of his nose because his mouth was always full of tobacco juice. He would spit it over the rail and tell us to come in.

We would all tear our shoes off and rush into the living room and fight over the giant pillow. That was the best for watching T.V. on. While we fought for the pillow, grandpa and grandma would come in and spark up a conversation with us. They would usually start out with questions about why Mom had to go outside the house to work. They wanted to know why she wasn't at home watching her kids and cooking for my dad.

I don't want to call them stupid so I'll just stick with simple. The four of us kids were smart enough to see through their line of questioning and we were pretty good at turning the question and answer session around and getting them to tell us stories about when they were young. Grandpa would sit there breathing heavily out of his nose while grandma would start talking about growing up inside the walls of a junkyard.

It was during the great depression, that four children lost their mother to kidney failure. Grandma was the oldest female, so she had to take up the role as mother to the other children. The cooking and the laundry were the main jobs that she had to do. This wasn't ordinary cooking like we have today; this was the kind of cooking that required big knives and live chickens. While grandma was doing all the housework, the other kids were helping their father rebuild cars out in the junkyard. The goal was to fix up a car and then sell it. So, with all these cars around, their father was given extra gasoline rations for his business. He was even allowed to keep a large pod full of gas on the premises.

The kids would help him by handing him tools and retrieving parts for him. Each night after working, everyone would come back inside and expect dinner. Grandma would put the chicken and potatoes on the table and the five of them would sit down to eat.

Grandma would then be expected to clean up after dinner and get everyone's clothes ready for the next day.

In the evenings, grandma would finally have a chance to do her schoolwork. It would be very late before she ever got to go to bed. When she turned out the light one particular evening, she heard something outside in the junkyard. They couldn't afford to keep dogs for protection, so they relied on a fence to keep people honest and to keep those delicious chickens in.

I would be listening so intensely, that I didn't even realize that my younger brother's leg was touching mine. Any less concentration would have resulted in him being slugged and me having to stand in the corner for the rest of the story. We seized every single word that came from her mouth and embraced it. She continued to tell us about the dangers of being a girl at those times and how dangerous it really was to be alone.

She picked up her dad's double-barreled shotgun and moved into the dooryard. The noise was a deep hollow *bong* that was coming from over near the gas pod. She quietly moved closer carrying the gun. Her movements were rather awkward carrying this cannon under her arm. It was so heavy that she had to arch her back just to keep the muzzle from pointing at the ground. With each step closer she took, the gun got heavier and heavier for her tiny body to carry. And there he was, climbing down off the pod with his small gas can and rubber hose. He saw her and started walking straight at her. She couldn't see the evil look on his face, just the hat and the shadows that covered his face. He set the can down and came after her with the siphon hose in both hands. By this time the heavy shotgun was pointed at the ground and nowhere near the man. She tried with all her might to point the gun at him, but she wasn't strong enough. She lifted and lifted and arched her back even more and with one final grunt of energy she leaned back and fired the gun. The blast had pushed him over the rest of the way and with a thud, she landed on the ground.

Now of course her dad came running out to see what all the commotion was about. When he found my grandmother, she was still laying on the ground near his shotgun. "What are you shooting at?" he asked her. The man was no longer in sight and the only evidence of a crime was the full gas can and the rubber hose lying near the pod.

I would realize, at this point, that our legs were touching and proceed in giving my brother the thumping he deserved for touching my leg with his. Grandpa would jump up quickly and grunt with his mouth full of

brown juice, "MMMMP." He would open the door, spit and walk me to my chair in the corner.

When my mom came to pick us up, she would wait for us at the door. We would come running to hug her and she would tell us to hurry to the car. As we left each day that summer, I could see behind the kitchen door, in the corner, a large blue shotgun and I never asked.

Mom's parents were too busy for stories. They wanted adult conversation and cocktail parties and they wanted the kids with a babysitter or outside playing. Their backyard was boring. All the branches of all the trees were too high and the ones you could reach were ornamental trees and not for climbing. The rose gardens were lush and the tulips were lined up in spring. There weren't any vegetables, just plots and plots of stupid flowers. You even had to ask permission to get a ball out of them. The lawn was neatly mowed and bagged by a company that mowed all of Boppa's friends' lawns and another man with a truck plowed the driveway.

The Cole's always wanted you to go with them to see the orchestra play. You would have to get dressed up and wear shoes that were too big or too small. They would pick you up in their fancy car and drive you in silence to the place that we would hear the music. They would pull in the parking lot slowly, making sure that all the other rich people could see their beautiful automobile, the fruit of their wealth. They wouldn't even park next to a car if wasn't fancy like theirs.

When you got inside, the fancy people would talk in those cutesy voices. Nana would tell the people that I was her grandson and wasn't I darling. I didn't get the chance to practice that death grip handshake I was working on with my dad. The people would just walk away.

We would get to our seats and watch and listen. The bows rise and sharply fall the dancing lunatic with the tinker toy in his hand would jerk about in a convulsion. Everybody would clap on cue and the intermissions were far and few between. The pants were too tight and the clip-on tie was bugging my throat. I was always glad to go home after those. I always wondered what they were saying about me as I ran up the steps away from their big fancy car and how long it would be before I would have to go to another one of those things.

All I really wanted to do was play baseball with my buddies. I mean, forget all that stupid orchestra stuff. Give me a baseball diamond any day.

I took a chance one year and tried out for the majors in Little League. It was my older brother, Martin I that tried out. I figured that we had a pretty good chance of making it. After all, they can't separate two

brothers. We showed up at the elementary school gym to give it our best shots at playing with the older kids.

Inside the school gym there were all kinds of kids there to try out.

There were also a lot of kids who were there to watch and taunt all of us little kids. Some of these older kids were actually helping out with the tryouts by pitching and catching. I felt a little intimidated by these older kids.

We started the tryouts by hitting. The big-kid pitcher was throwing a tennis ball to the catcher. As soon as I saw that we were going to try out for the major league with a tennis ball, I knew that I was going to do well. It was a tennis ball for crying out loud, how could anybody miss that? We waited for a long time in line with our nametags on our shirts. The coaches took turns calling everybody and letting the kids have their chance at batting.

When they called my brother's name, I realized that all the other kids were laughing. It was my brother's appearance. He was ready to go to his Cello recital right afterwards. He wore a blue oxford shirt and tie and his shoes were brown penny loafers.

I knew he could hit pretty good so I didn't worry about him. I just kept thinking about my swing and my batting stance, and keeping my eye on the ball. I was talking my self into such frenzy, that I didn't realize that my brother had missed his first pitch. His feet were sliding around in the masking taped batters box with those stupid shoes. People were asking me about him and I just kept saying that he had a cello recital to go to, like it was normal or something. I wore my gym shoes and shorts like the rest of the kids. I really tried to avoid even being near my brother that day. I know it's probably a sin to be ashamed of your own brother. Don't get me wrong, he is a fantastic cello player, it's just that I didn't want to be associated with a fantastic cello player at the major league tryouts.

"Andy Hamilton," the cocky coach's voice sounded. I was a little embarrassed about my older brother's performance and now I was mixing that emotion with nervousness. I could hear the other kids jeer at me about Martin's whiffing and that I was sure to fail because I was smaller. I gripped the bat and entered the batter's box. I took my well-rehearsed stance and stared into the eyes of the pitcher. I could see my dad and brother standing over by the door. Martin was still wearing his clip-on tie and my dad seemed like he was holding my coat open for me to hurry up and whiff so we could leave for the stupid cello recital.

The pitcher threw his first pitch and I connected sending the ball back at the pitcher. That tennis ball went right into his throat. He dropped his glove and grabbed at his throat and cried like a baby. He was supposed to be a big kid and here I was the

little brother of the nerd-geek that sucked at batting. I kind of felt badly about the crying big kid in the middle of the gym. Everyone was looking at him and then at me like I was some sort of jerk for hitting the pitcher.

The new pitcher took the place of the crying kid and tried to strike me out. I hit the next ball into the rafters and the final ball actually hit the basketball backboards at the far end of the gym. I knew I made it. The people in the gym that day knew I made it.

My dad was almost frantic now, shaking my coat open. My brother looked angry. I was confused at his anger. I couldn't figure out if he was angry with me for making him late for his recital or for doing so well. We made the recital on time. He gave me a big shove out of the way when we got there.

Inside the hall, there were all kinds of people. The other musicians were making that unmistakable sound of warming up. People were looking at me like I was some kind of freak. It was the look of disgust. I realized how underdressed I was. Who the hell would wear gym shoes and ratty clothes to a fancy-shmancy cello recital? Either way, I made the major league, so I found out halfway through the season.

They never separate brothers in the Little League and they weren't going to separate my brother and me. He didn't make the majors. I made the majors and my dad wouldn't let them separate us; they never separate brothers. I spent that season playing in the minor league with the rest of the little kids and of course, my older brother.

It was second grade and the mighty Mrs. Paris couldn't get Tom Zylowski to talk. He had done something really bad and she could not get him to admit or deny his actions. If he admitted his wrongdoings, she could punish him and if he denied his guilt, she could punish him for lying. That was always her little trap for us. It was at that split second in time, that miniscule blink in time, that I realized that Tom's silence was the only way that a 4-foot tall, 60 lb boy could overpower a 300 lb adult. I could see the frustration building in Mrs. Paris' eyes as she kept saying, "Answer me!" He stared emotionless at something across the room; something so far off that only he could see it. She just kept on screaming her demand at him. The whole class watched Tom. I saw the amazement in the other kid's eyes and then the victory stare from Tom.

She had to call in the Principal. Mr. Glantz came in and tried to break him. He kind of looked like Bella Lugosi, with his nice dark suit and black slicked back hair. Mr. Glantz was going to show us all how tough he was. He tried twice and realized that Tom was winning with silence. The silence made Tom bigger than a fat second grade teacher and now bigger than a

school Principal. I thought about this situation thoroughly and packed it away for my own use.

It was probably weeks later that I got the chance to use this weapon against my parents. We all know that I was responsible for most of the trouble in my house, so it took little time for my parents to start questioning me after some commotion was raised. Now, I didn't cut down any cherry trees or anything that simple, but when I did something bad, I went all the way. This wasn't the time that I painted on our black lab's hair with Clorox, or the time I raided my older brother's top left drawer. This was the granddaddy of all. I destroyed school property.

My cousin Charlie stole a 'BULLSHIT' stamp from his Dad's desk and brought it to school. I thought it was funny looking at that backwards swear word in Charlie's hand. I thought it was so funny that I just had to see printed on something, but that would require some sort of me grabbing it from him and stamping it on something.

The bell rang and all the little school children started moving like farm animals towards the big glass doors. Charlie was showing one more person his stamp and that's when I made my move. I grabbed the stamp from his hand and stabbed the outside of the orange brick schoolhouse. That was humor. The stamp was for putting on crummy papers or reports that Charlie's Dad would get from his employees letting them know that their work was bullshit. I had made a political and social statement that was so huge in my little world. That little stamp said so much to me. The graffiti said that Mrs. Paris was Bullshit, Mr. Glantz was Bullshit, the janitor that yelled at me for getting fingerprints on the drinking fountain was Bullshit and pretty much any other school policy that was put out to make kids conform, was Bullshit.

Two inches wide and about a half inch tall was all the damage I did and they still called it destruction of school property. You guessed it, my parents were called and I saw them both before the final bell that day. I did get a ride home though. The ride was pretty quiet. They both took turns glaring at me from the front seat and saying, "We'll talk when we get home." Little did they know what I had in store for them.

There in the kitchen were both my brothers and my sister when my folks started their interrogation on me. I unpacked my freshly mothballed silence and turned on the veil of the distant stare. It was awesome! They didn't know what to do. They were screaming at me and trying to get me to talk and I wasn't budging. I just kept thinking about Tom Zylowski and his powers and kept on winning. I was a giant in the eyes of my siblings.

I learned so much in the second grade. I learned about Abraham Lincoln and multiplying single

digits. I even learned about some rights and freedoms that we Americans have, like free speech and press. I also learned the power of silence.

The fall was a beautiful season in Painted Post. The streets were lined with long piles of orange and red leaves and the smell of wood smoke filled my neighborhood. People's porches were decorated for autumn. The closer it got to Halloween, the happier I became. I was getting a little too old for trick-or-treating but still faked the interest in the sport to get to go out with my friends at night.

On the way over to my best pal Jake's, I could see all the kiddies with their parents walking door to door. The ghosts and witches would all say the same thing at every door. What I really loved were those costumes that were like a plastic jumpsuit that came with a Frankenstein mask. The best part were the scenes from the old Boris Karlov movie on it. Really scary!

I usually wore something that was dark and could pass for normal clothes. Jake didn't even have to wear a costume. His mother was too busy taking care of his little sister to mess with him about his intentions that night. We would go out to one of the busy streets and look for a house with a garden.

The Thompson's always had a garden in their backyard. Mr. Thompson would work out there everyday in the summer. He had to ever since he lost his job. There were a bunch of hungry kids in that house that would have been pretty hungry if he didn't. He had neat rows of corn and carrots. There were potatoes and squash. Most of the garden was picked, canned and frozen by that time of year. The stuff that was left in the garden was ruined because of frost. As usual, we helped ourselves to a few choice tomatoes and moved from behind the house to the side for a better view of the road.

Throwing fruits and vegetables at cars doesn't really make a person bad. It's just a release of daily stress that most teenagers I knew, practiced. We were even selective about the cars we hit. If it was a station wagon, forget it. That was probably some guy down on his luck, you know, with the family and all. If it was a Camaro, we let Jake throw. His dad left his mom a few years back and the car he drove away in was a Camaro. Jake usually took all two-door sports cars, just to be sure. If it was a van or a big truck, we let my little brother throw his tomato. We figured it was a confidence booster for him if he got to throw at something big and easy. Now if the car just happened to be a Cadillac and a Mercedes, we all would send a torrent of hard tomatoes. Sometimes we would even rush the road and pelt them at point blank range. The

fruit would hit and make that beautiful *thud* sound; the way that only a hard tomato in late October can.

Just imagine being in that car a few moments before we hit them. The people would be talking about vacations and cigars, while listening to cello music when out of nowhere... *thud-thud...thud-thud-thud!*

It's kind of ironic when you think about it. The fruits of the working class met the fruits of the rich every Halloween night right in the middle of the road in my neighborhood and I was what brought the two together. Those people would slam on their brakes and pretend to come after us and we would run home and wait to get them again next year.

It was always in the hot summer that I would see the crocodilian police cruiser basking in the sun, waiting for an unwary out-of-towner to move too close to its laser beam eyes. At night, you would be at home and the silent hunter would swim past your house with no lights on. In the daytime, we could see the cops walking around like cowboys. They had that slow motion, bowlegged, tough guy, heal to toe heal to toe walk that would be perfect in a gunfighter movie except they didn't have their jingle-jangle spurs on. They were ready for action.

I suppose that if you kept you lawn mowed and you dog quiet, Painted Post, NY is a safe haven for conformists and law abiders. On garbage day, the cans are perfectly lined up in front of the houses, which are lined up on the streets, which are all perfectly straight and square to the highway, which passes straight through our town. The only deviation from the right angle is the bike path, which lazily flowed through the residential section. We knew every twist and turn on the bike path. We knew which sections were blocked off from cars and we knew all the little paths that lead from it into someone's backyard.

In the summers, we always could get our parents to let us stay over at one of our friends' houses. Who wouldn't? The town is virtually crime free with the exception of an occasional speeder. Once we were at the friend's house and the parents were asleep, we would slip out the back door and the streets were ours. These were wide, open, quiet streets free from traffic. Everyone was at home and in bed like they should be.

Being the poorest of all of my friends, I never had a bike, so I would have to ride my buddy Jake's Mom's bike. This bike was a real beauty. It had a child seat for Jake's little sister and baskets all around it. There were tassels hanging from the handlebars and a little bell you never rang because it would draw attention to you. You would think this lady could get a week's worth of groceries loaded on this bike by the way she had it decked out. This was the clumsiest bike

in town and we proudly named it 'The Sopwith Camel.' That old rickety bike would do me just fine especially at hours of the morning that not too many people would see me riding it.

Our first stop would always be this one back yard that had a swimming pool. We would hide our bikes in the bushes along the bike path and slip over the fence into the soft warm water. While swimming we would always help ourselves to the little outdoor fridge that was well stocked with beer. Hey, who wouldn't? I mean, if these people had *invited* us to their pool, they would have offered it, so we skipped all the formalities of an invitation.

We would always grab a few beers for the road and hop back on the bikes to hit the next backyard pool. The next stop would be the public pool, which is at the far end of the bike path. The public pool was considered by most as too easy to swim in and far too cold to be fun.

When we got to the fence this particular evening, we heard voices coming from the pool already. We had been beaten to the punch by a bunch of girls and as we got closer to the fence we saw that they didn't have clothes on. With our hearts racing, we hopped the fence and wrestled our clothes off. I put my clothes in a neat pile so they would be easy to find and keep dry, and then dove in to the brisk water.

We were all swimming along drinking the beers and laughing with the girls. We didn't swim too close to them because the cold water wasn't helping us out one *tiny* bit. That's when it happened. The cop car pulled right up against the fence and the cop jumped on the hood of the car and leaped over the fence like a gymnast. People were thrashing in the water trying to get away. The girls were already getting dressed, so it was easy for them to make their escape. I make one of the *strangest* decisions I have ever made and tried to swim for it. I could see Jake climbing the fence already and there I was still in the middle of the pool with the cop's flashlight shining on me.

I knew he wasn't coming in to get me, but I also knew that he could run faster than I could swim. He was calling to me and telling me that I had better get out or he would call the state police for backup. That's one phone call that I really wanted to avoid.

"Um, Mom, it's me... Andy."

"Yea, I'm ok."

"I've been arrested."

"Um trespassing."

"And drinking."

"Um,...and public nudity."

No thank you. I would have been dead. I would have been disowned. I would have been the center of attention in a town where everyone had been successfully avoiding attention for over a hundred years.

I would have been that kid who had to move out of town to live with an aunt. My mom wouldn't be able to go to church at the same mass that I was the alter boy for. My Dad would have been the *streaker's* Dad. It wouldn't have been good having a son that was deranged enough to be naked in public. I would have to run for my life and for my parents' reputation. I swam for the far end of the pool like a goose on top of the water and hit the fence so fast that I don't even remember landing. I do remember crawling up a thick brush covered hill though. I dove in the bushes and made my way dragging my naked body up to the top. I didn't feel the thorns scratch my pasty flesh and I didn't realize where the cop was.

"Oh yea, Mom, resisting arrest too."

I waited for an eternity in those bushes. I was beginning to realize the scrapes and cuts and dirt all over my body. I must have waited there for a half an hour before the cop drove away. When I was sure he was gone, I stood up and hacked my way back down the hill towards the fence and pool.

Jake was there and he was still naked. He was a chubby kid and he was now covered with pine needles and scratches. I guess we both must have looked pretty funny standing there shivering. I went back over the fence to get cleaned off and to get my clothes. I quietly dove into the chilly waters and felt the true damage tingle. I climbed out and Jake said, "He took 'em."
"What?"
"Our clothes."

Riding the Sopwith Camel had always been a spectacle for me. There was always a little bit of embarrassment being on this women's bike all decked out with tassels and bells and that night was no exception.

I didn't win that night. I didn't get a medal for water or land speed records either. I did, however, preserve my parents from a lifetime of embarrassment and I saved my place at the dinner table. You can score one for the cops that night though, that is, one pair of size 10 1/2 Chuck Taylor hi-tops, one green bathing suit, one Nike t-shirt, one Popeye pillow case (for the beer,) and that's it.

I think people are sometimes like oil and water. You can shake us up and mix us together, but we always go back to where we are from. I will cherish the times when I personally shook things up, the times when, for a few moments, that I was above the oil.

❖ Andrew Hamilton

The Healer

Taught that we were the wildest of the worshippers
And banished to little rooms in the basement.
The true believers praised the same deity,
They repented in the large room upstairs.
Today we would join together as we were
To witness the power of prayer; through
The manifestation of a healer.

The wild ones lined up and waited to enter the room—
Patiently to witness a true prophet.
He hadn't seen the chubby smile that
Hid behind long velvet drapes impatiently
Playing with other wild ones. The yellow cotton
Dress was covered up by the long panels
Of forest green crushed velvet.
Mary Jane's were the only viewable
Owners of the hidden giggle.

The words he whispered deafened the innocence
Of her wild ears. His communion was fixed!
His eloquent words rehearsed! He told sick to
Fall and claim to be healed. There was no power
Only an act. What about the prayer?
What about the faith? Peeking
Around the velvet, she quietly listened
As the healer lied.

She entered the big room that was full of the privileged.
Amazed at the spendthrifts and true believers,
Full of spirit, donating to his prodigal prayer.
Confusion swarmed over her heart.
Should she still believe in God?
Were her Bible stories fixed? With her
Split spirit and crippled soul—
The wild one went home and cried.

❖ Bobbi Button

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Up to five poems or three prose pieces may be submitted at a time. The editorial staff reserves the right to hold works for publication in future editions. Submitted materials cannot be returned.

